

# ***Binge Drinking and College Students***

Regardless of a student's age, it is often easy for a college student to purchase or drink alcoholic beverages. The recent growth of binge drinking on college campuses across the United States has college officials, law enforcement, and parents concerned about the repercussions of binge drinking. Learn more about binge drinking: what it is, how it affects individuals, and what can be done to prevent binge drinking.

## **What is Binge Drinking?**

Binge drinking is defined as drinking five or more drinks in a row for men, or four or more drinks in a row for women. One "drink" is defined as 12-ounces of beer or wine cooler; four ounces of wine; or one shot of liquor. The number of drinks versus gender is based on the rate in which a female absorbs alcohol versus a male.

Often, individuals who participate in binge drinking do so in an attempt to become intoxicated. According to a study conducted by the Harvard School of Public Health, binge drinking is the most serious drug problem on college campuses. This study found that binge drinking has serious repercussions on the educational process, and carries a risk of physical injury, disease, and death.

## **Who Is Likely to Be a Binge Drinker?**

From a random sampling of 140 four-year colleges and universities, the Harvard School of Public Health asked students various questions regarding their drinking behavior. Findings from the binge-drinking study showed the extent of binge drinking to be the following:

- Forty-four percent of students were binge drinkers: 50 percent of the males polled, and 39 percent of the women.
- Intoxication, or drinking to get drunk, was the main goal of binge drinking.
- Approximately 50 percent of binge drinkers were also considered "frequent" binge drinkers (defined as having participated in binge drinking three or more times in the past two weeks).
- The percent of binge drinkers was almost uniform from freshman year to graduation, regardless of the students being under the legal drinking age or not.

In addition, the study showed that certain factors were shown to predicate the typical college binge drinker:

- The typical college-student binge drinker consumed alcohol in high school. High-school students who were binge drinkers were three times more likely to be binge drinkers in college.
- Caucasian students were twice as likely to binge drink than other races or ethnicities.
- Students who felt athletic participation was important were one and a half times more likely to binge drink.
- Students who felt religious participation was not very important were twice as likely to binge-drink.
- Students in a fraternity or sorority were four times more likely to binge drink.

One of the more startling findings was that regardless of their alcohol-consumption level, most students felt they did not have a drinking problem. Only two-tenths of one percent of all the students polled classified themselves as a problem drinker.

## **The Effects of Binge Drinking**

While the physical effects of binge drinking include the risk of memory loss, blackouts, coma and death, seemingly less-threatening side effects also occur. Frequent binge drinkers on college campuses reported:

- Missing class or falling behind in schoolwork.
- Engaging in unplanned sexual activity.
- Engaging in unprotected sexual activity.
- Getting in trouble with campus law enforcement.
- Damaging property.
- Getting hurt or injured.
- Driving while intoxicated.
- Riding in an automobile with a drunk driver.
- A high likeliness to use other drugs.

## **Helping To Prevent Binge Drinking**

There are ways to prevent binge drinking on college campuses. Education is vital, but social, legal, and economic changes must also be implemented. Some ideas the Harvard School of Public Health suggested include:

- A zero-tolerance policy for alcohol-related violence.
- Limited or regulated alcohol use on campus.
- Restricting access to liquor by not serving intoxicated patrons and enhancing law enforcement presence.
- No alcohol-related sponsorships or marketing on college campuses.
- Stricter enforcement of carding and confiscating fake IDs.

Parents can also help:

- Talk to your child about the dangers of binge drinking. Stress that fun can be had in a safe manner.
- Talk to college administrators about enforcing the ideas mentioned above.
- Write letters to local law enforcement about paying extra attention to liquor purveyors close to college campuses.

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